

ICPS newsletter

E-government: achievements in the name of democracy

A new issue of the bulletin Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie v perekhodnykh ekonomikakh (Russian-language version of the Local Government Brief) will be coming out next week, commissioned by the Open Society Institute's "Local Government Initiatives" (LGI) program and published by the International Centre for Policy Studies. This issue will deal with the prospects for introducing e-government in transition economies

The possibilities unveiled by e-government are impressive—more efficient access to government services and officials, reduced expenditures on the government's administrative functions, increased public access to budget information and documents, as well as making government more transparent and accountable. Nevertheless, along with the prospects of e-government are also some challenges. For instance, in certain countries of the region the so-called "digital divide" threatens to widen the development gap between various social groups. E-government is unfeasible for introduction where there is neither Internet access nor technological know-how applied, nor any proper incentives.

What e-government is and what purpose it serves

Electronic government (e-government) is the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to transform government by making it more accessible to citizens, more effective and more accountable. Given the above definition, e-government does not imply simply installing more computers on the desks of civil servants. In fact, it changes the relationship between government officials and the public. The implementation of e-government envisages:

- providing comprehensive online access to information (laws, draft laws, other normative-legal acts, forms for necessary documents, as well as economic and scientific data);
- promoting civic engagement in government activities by facilitating more convenient interaction with government officials via electronic channels, such as

electronically filling in documents that need to be submitted;

- increasing government accountability by making its operations more transparent, thereby reducing corruption risks;
- supporting development goals by diminishing time and expense for small-businesses when interacting with government, as well as providing rural and other peripheral communities with information and communications infrastructure.

E-government does exist outside rich countries. Nowadays, developing countries are frequently pioneering Internet use in governance; ICTs are increasingly being used to streamline the administrative system and connect it closer with the people it serves.

E-governance will not be put in operation by a government's merely purchasing additional computers and launching a website; this will only allow the computerisation of some administrative activities. Rather, e-governance is a process to transform government; it requires planning, political willpower, and a stable flow of necessary resources. Neither the purchase of more advanced technology nor the automation of complex procedures themselves can boost the effectiveness of government or civic participation in public life. Technical innovations will not alter the attitudes of bureaucrats who do not view citizens as consumers of government services or participants in policy decision making.

Three phases of e-governance

The process of e-governance may be divided into three phases. They do not depend on each other, nor need one phase

ICPS Supervisory Board approves new ICPS products

At the last regular meeting of the ICPS Supervisory Board, its members and honoured guests—ambassadors of European states and representatives of renowned international organisations—were given a presentation of new ICPS products that the Centre intends to offer its clients in future:

- Political Commentary—a new monthly bulletin providing an overview of trends in Ukrainian politics and factors affecting its formation;
- Template for policy memos to draft laws—a new format of the Verkhovna Rada document, which analyses problems and main alternative solutions, and determines the necessary course of public policy to pursue;
- Policy campaigns—a widely used tool in developed democratic societies for adopting government decisions that are perceived variously by influential social groups. Campaigns involve research and public discussions, and offer a democratic way to advocate policy and win extensive support for it;
- Sharing ICPS experience in introducing public policy methods—program developed based on ICPS's previous experience in supporting social transformation processes in Central Asian countries.

be completed before another can begin. Such a phase-by-phase division is a convenient system for thinking about the goals of e-government.

Usage of ICT to make government information more accessible.

Governments usually generate large volumes of information of high importance to individuals and businesses. The Internet and other advanced communications technologies can deliver this information quickly and directly to

citizens. Strategies for implementing this phase of e-government greatly diverge by their content and design, but generally transitional and developing countries may start by distributing government information online, primarily by posting laws, normative-legal acts, forms for necessary documents, and statistical and economic data. Enabling citizens and businesses to readily access government information without having to go to government offices, stand in long queues, or pay bribes could become a revolutionary achievement for countries with highly inefficient and corrupt bureaucracies. One element of this phase could be the launch of a government portal (like that put up by the Mexican government), offering one-stop access to various websites and informational resources.

Increased civic participation in public administration. Websites, however rich in content, are just the first step. E-government has the potential of involving citizens in the governance

process by facilitating their interaction with policymakers throughout the policy cycle and at all government levels. Boosting civic engagement nourishes the public trust in government. Interactive e-government envisages two-way communication, starting with such basic actions as publication of e-mail contact information for government officials, or feedback forms that allow people to submit comments on draft laws and other public policy proposals. One such website that allows citizens to submit their comments on legislative initiatives is maintained by the Namibian parliament. This phase of e-governance may also include the creation of citizen/government forums (such as the one created by the government of Armenia), where people can exchange ideas, increase their awareness about various issues, and furnish opportunities for activism unconstrained by distance.

Online government services. Governments can expand their presence in the Internet, launching websites that

enable users to transact online. Like the private sector uses the Internet to engage in e-commerce, so governments can conduct online transactions. The key benefits of such innovations include long-term cost savings, ensuring accountability (by introducing electronic records) and boosting labour productivity. Formerly, government services such as land registration or driver's license renewal required long waits, clashes with omnipotent bureaucrats, and even bribes. Innovations in enhancing accessibility (examples of which include public Internet kiosks in Brazilian shopping malls or portable computers delivered into rural areas by the Indian government) bring e-government to the most remote corners of developing countries. ■

If you wish to regularly receive the bulletin Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie v perekhodnykh ekonomikakh, please call (38-044) 236-5464 or mail to marketing@icps.kiev.ua. You may also register online at <http://www.icps.com.ua/eng/pubfree>.

Winners selected in public policy research competition

The ICPS-facilitated competition solicited proposals on researching public policy, with judging based on the most current topics and demonstrated capability to implement projects. The seven winning regional public organisations were recommended for financing by the International Renaissance Foundation

At the end of April 2003, the International Centre for Policy Studies jointly with the Razumkov Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies announced a competition for research on current issues of regional socioeconomic development, under the framework of the "Capacity Building of Regional Centres for Policy Analysis at the Local Level" project, financed by the International Renaissance Foundation. The invitation to tender was extended to community organisations that are engaged in analytical activities and wish to increase their capabilities in the sphere of public policy. For this endeavour, ICPS and the Razumkov UCEPS will be assuming a new role as resource centres supporting policy analysis projects, and sharing their experience with regional research organisations.

The competition elicited proposals from 58 organisations in all regions of Ukraine.

The key topics submitted by organisations pertained to local socioeconomic development and support for entrepreneurship, unemployment problems, tourism development, strategic planning for territorial development, and public participation in decision-making processes, as well as quality control over local government services.

When selecting organisations, the evaluating commission paid attention to experience and capacity for doing public policy research, possibilities of cooperation with local government bodies, businesses, and other community organisations, and the relevancy and justification of the problem of local/regional socioeconomic development that lays the ground for the research.

Based on the above set of criteria, the following seven winners were selected:

- Centre for Municipal and Regional Development, Drohobych (Lviv oblast)—"Efficiency and Effectiveness of Economic and Social Development Planning in the Cities of Boryslav and Drohobych";
- Kolomyia Regional Economic Development Association, Kolomyia (Ivano-Frankivsk oblast)—"Design of a Socioeconomic Development Strategy for the City of Kolomyia";

- Centre for Studying Social Processes and Humanism Issues, Luhansk—"Analysis of Prospects for Real Public Involvement in Local and Regional Development and the Role of Local Self-government Bodies and Local Administration in Designing Regional Development Plans";

- DONBAS Regional Development Agency, Donetsk—"Analysis of Policy to Support Development of Depressed Territories in the Donbas";

- Mykolaiv Association of Employer Entrepreneurs, Mykolaiv—"Inadequacy of the Local Taxation System";

- Association of Entrepreneurs of Trostianets Region, town of Trostianets (Vinnytsia oblast)—"Design of a Strategic Urban Development Plan";

- Western Ukrainian Centre for Human Rights and Community Initiatives, city of Stryi (Lviv oblast)—"Rural Hromadas as Active Participants in Socioeconomic Development in Rural Areas".

The winning organisations will have the opportunity to elaborate their topics and draft project proposals for public policy-related research that will be recommended by ICPS experts and UCEPS for financing by the International Renaissance Foundation. ■

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